



REASON & REVELATION

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MICAH Predicted the **PLACE**

“I Am
He”?

AP STUDY BIBLE
Goes Digital

GENTILES
Received the Spirit
Before Baptism?

Micah, the Messiah, and the Little Town of Bethlehem

Eric Lyons, M.Min.

Article In Brief...

Pieces of the Messianic puzzle had been revealed for thousands of years, but never had a prophet predicted and recorded for all time the precise place in which the Christ would be born. Then, seven centuries before the birth of the Messiah, during dark days in Judah's history, the prophet Micah revealed with great precision the "little [town] among the thousands of Judah" in which "the One to be Ruler in Israel" would be born. Micah 5:2 is a fascinating passage of Scripture that testifies to both the Bible's supernatural inspiration as well as the identity and divine nature of Jesus Christ.

CONFUSION OVER THE CHRIST

THE crowds murmured while the critics lurked in the shadows. Complaints, compliments, and confusion over the Man from Galilee spread among the Jews at the Feast of Tabernacles like political opinions circulate today on social media during election time.

- "Some said, 'He is good'; others said, 'No, on the contrary, He deceives the people'" (John 7:12).
- In response to Jesus' question, "Why do you seek to kill Me?" The people answered and said, "You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?" (7:19-20).

Yet others said, "Is this not He whom they seek to kill?" (7:25).

- "[S]ome of them from Jerusalem said... 'Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ?'" (7:26).
- The officers (whom the Pharisees and chief priests sent to arrest Jesus) came back empty-handed, saying, "No man ever spoke like this Man." Yet, the Pharisees arrogantly responded, "Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed" (7:46-48). "Search and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee" (7:52, NASB).

- "Some of the people therefore, after they heard these words [of Jesus], were saying, 'This truly is the Prophet.' Others were saying, 'This is the Christ.' But others were saying, 'Surely the Christ is not coming from Galilee, is He? Has the Scripture not said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?' So a dissension occurred in the crowd because of Him" (7:40-43, NASB).

The hard-hearted, egocentric Pharisees and chief priests did not know the Old Testament as well as they professed. They chided the common people for their ignorance of the Law (7:48) and then contemptibly challenged Nicodemus to "[s]earch and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee" (7:52, NASB). Yet, the prophet Jonah was from Gath Hepher of Zebulun (2 Kings 14:25; Joshua 19:10-13), which is in Galilee. Furthermore, in the desperate, dark days of Assyrian dominance in Galilee in the late eighth century B.C. (cf. 2 Kings 15:29), the prophet Isaiah foretold of the everlasting Prince of Peace coming as a "great light" in "the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali... in Galilee of the Gentiles" (Isaiah 9:1-7). Who was this "great light"? Jesus of Nazareth, Who "came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet" (Matthew 4:13-14). Indeed, **in one sense**, the greatest Prophet of them all, the Messiah, came "out of Galilee."¹

BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA— "THE CITY OF DAVID"

IN another real sense, the "commoners"² were right, too. **"Scripture said..."** that the Christ

comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was" (John 7:42). David may have dwelt in Israel's capital city of Jerusalem once he became king and conquered the Jebusite city (2 Samuel 5:6-7), but it seems most any Jew knew that David's heritage was in Bethlehem.

This Bethlehem was not the Bethlehem of Zebulun (Joshua 19:15; in Galilee), but the Bethlehem of Judah, also known as Ephrath or Ephrathah.³ People of Bethlehem were known as "Ephrathites" (Ruth 1:1-2; 1 Samuel 17:12). David's great grandfather, Boaz, "came from Bethlehem" (Ruth 2:4; 4:11). David's father, Jesse, was an "Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah" (1 Samuel 17:12,15; 16:1,4). Prior to his 33-year reign in Jerusalem, which **became known** as "the city of David" (2 Samuel 5:7-9), David himself referred to **Bethlehem** as "his city" (1 Samuel 20:6). In this sense, even Luke referred to **Bethlehem of Judah** as "the city of David" (Luke 2:4).

Why did Joseph and Mary travel all the way from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem of Judea? To be registered in the Roman census (Luke 2:1-2). But why Bethlehem? Because "all went to be registered, everyone to his **own city**" (Luke 2:3), and Joseph "was of the house and lineage of David," and Bethlehem was "the city of David" (Luke 2:4,11,15).

The Star of Bethlehem

In about 1,400 B.C. God used a non-Jewish, Mesopotamian soothsayer named Balaam to prophesy to the Moabites about, among other things, how "a **Star** shall come out of Jacob; a **Scepter** shall rise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17). Some 400 years later, this prophecy had an "immediate" application in Israel's great King David. But 1,400 years later, Balaam's prophecy would have

its remote application and ultimate fulfillment in "the Root and the Offspring of David, **the Bright and Morning Star**" (Revelation 22:16; cf. Isaiah 11:1,10; Revelation 5:5). [And He has the greatest of all scepters—having "all authority...in heaven and on Earth" (Matthew 28:18).]

Amazingly, one of the first signs of the coming of the long-awaited Messiah was the appearance of "His star" (Matthew 2:2,9), which "wise men [or "magi," NASB] from the East" followed all the way to Judea (Matthew 2:1).⁴ The wise men stopped in Jerusalem, asking, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him" (Matthew 2:2). But Herod, the ruthless king of Judea, knew nothing about these things and inquired of "all the chief priests and scribes...**where the Christ was to be born**" (Matthew 2:4). What these men knew was the same thing the crowd knew 30-plus years later in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7): The Messiah was to be born "[i]n **Bethlehem of Judea**, for thus it is written by the prophet, 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel' (Matthew 2:5-6).

THE DARK DAYS OF MICAH

WHAT "Scripture" is this that says "the Christ comes from the town of **Bethlehem**, where David was" (John 7:42)? Who was this prophet who wrote that "a Ruler" will come from "Bethlehem, in the land of Judah" (Matthew 2:5-6)?

His name was Micah and he was from the country town of Moresheth (about 20-25 miles southwest of Jerusalem). Micah himself refers to the town as "Moresheth Gath" (1:14), likely implying that for a time,

it "had fallen under the power of the neighboring Philistines of Gath."⁵ Micah lived during the same period as other eighth-century prophets, including Amos (1:1) and Hosea (1:1), who prophesied to the Northern Kingdom, and Isaiah (1:1), who prophesied along with Micah in the Southern Kingdom. It was "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" that Micah received "the word of the Lord" (Micah 1:1). These three kings reigned a combined 56 years (from about 742-687 B.C.). "Jotham...reigned sixteen years...and did what was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 27:1-2). Hezekiah, though not perfect, was also a great king, one of the greatest in Judah's long history, serving for 29 years (2 Kings 18:1-20:21; 2 Chronicles 29:1-32:33). Sandwiched between these two rulers was the cowardly, repulsive King Ahaz, one of the worst, most wicked kings in Judah's history, reigning for 16 dark years. Among other things, he "sacrificed to the gods of Damascus," "burned his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel," "shut up the doors of the house of the Lord," and overall, "encouraged moral decline in Judah" (28:23,3,24,20).

Sadly, whether during the reigns of wicked or righteous kings, the people of Judah, like their northern counterparts (Micah 1:5-13), mostly "still...acted corruptly" (2 Chronicles 27:2). Repugnant sinful behavior was especially characteristic of those in positions of authority. But the mighty prophet Micah did not hold back. He was given "[t]he Word of the Lord" (Micah 1:1), and as a good steward of the Divine revelation, he let the "high and mighty" have it.

I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

Now hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build up Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with iniquity. Her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money (Micah 3:8-11).

“[H]er rich men are full of violence” (6:12). Speaking hyperbolically, Micah professed, “The faithful man has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood; every man hunts his brother with a net. That they may successfully do evil with both hands—the prince asks for gifts, the judge seeks a bribe, and the great man utters his evil desire; so they scheme together” (7:2-3). In short, they “hate good and love evil” (3:2).

Tragically, Jerusalem was a repugnant center of spiritual disease (as was Samaria in the North). The courageous prophet Micah boldly confronted all manner of abusive leaders and prophesied of their eventual demise. “For behold, the Lord is coming.... The mountains will melt under Him.... I will make Samaria a heap of ruins” (Micah 1:3,4,6). And “Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins” (3:12). Indeed, the brutal Assyrians conquered Samaria in 722 B.C. And though Jerusalem was spared for a time following the fearless prophesying of Micah and Isaiah and the righteous reforms of King Hezekiah (cf. Jeremiah 26:18), the capital city of the Jews would fall calamitously at the hands of the Babylonians in 587 B.C., approximately 100 years after Micah pronounced the Lord’s judgments.

HOPE...AND HONING IN ON THE HERO

BUT not all is lost. There is Hope from Heaven. A Hero is on the horizon. Yes, God and His faithful prophets have con-

demned sin from the beginning,⁶ but the story **never** ended there. Even as Adam and Eve were lurking in the midst of sinfully-minded blame games (Genesis 3:11-13), God boldly announced to the devil His gracious plans to save humanity through “the Seed” of woman, Who would deal a crushing blow to the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15). “Since the world began,” God “spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets” about the Hope, the “horn of salvation,” Who would save His people from sin and its fatal consequences (Luke 1:67-70).

Remarkably, the Bible writers did not speak in mere broad generalities about the coming Christ. Throughout the Old Testament, God announced that the Deliverer of humankind (and the sinful mess that humanity made) would be a male descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, and David.⁷ Notice the spectacular specificity of the prophets! The Messiah, Who would bless “all the families of the earth” (Genesis 12:3), would come from Abraham (not his brothers Nahor or Haran). The Savior would come from Isaac (not Ishmael, and not Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishback, or Shuah, the other sons of Abraham—Genesis 25:2). He would come from Jacob (not Esau, the father of the Edomites). He would come from Judah (and not one of the other 11 sons of Jacob, not even Levi, the father of the Levitical priesthood). The ultimate “anointed One” (i.e., Christ) would come from the anointed King David (and not the other seven sons of Jesse—1 Samuel 16:1-13; 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Jeremiah 23:5-6). And from where did the greatest king in Israel’s history hail? Not Hebron, Jerusalem, or Jericho. Not Dan, Bethel, or Beersheba. And not Bethlehem of Zebulun (Joshua 19:15). Not anywhere in all of Palestine except from “the little among

the thousands of Judah” (Micah 5:2)—the town of Bethlehem of Ephrathah.

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”
- Micah 5:2 -*

MICAH’S MESSIANIC PROPHECY

MICAH chapter 5 begins with a doom-and-gloom statement seemingly about the siege that Sennacherib’s ruthless Assyrian army would lay against Jerusalem and King Hezekiah.⁸ Hezekiah (the most powerful “judge of Israel”) would be openly insulted by Sennacherib’s spokesman, the Rabshakeh, who would come to the door of Jerusalem, shouting taunting words of mockery in the Hebrew language for all to hear.⁹ In the words of Micah, Assyria would “strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek” (Micah 5:1).

Though the household of David in Hezekiah’s day would face humiliation,¹⁰ “the true Israel will come forth triumphant.”¹¹ How? Because “**the One to be Ruler in Israel...shall come forth**” (Micah 5:2). **The One** long-awaited descendant of Abraham and David was coming (Matthew 1:1). And though His presence **on Earth** would still

lie in the future, the Messiah, Micah testified, **already had a past!** His goings forth are “from of old;” “from long ago” (NASB).¹² How long? Micah said, “**From the days of eternity**” (5:2, NASB).¹³ But that must mean that the Messiah is...God. Indeed, as Isaiah, Micah’s fellow 8th-century prophet in Judah, said, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, **Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace**” (Isaiah 9:6).

According to Micah and Isaiah, God Himself would step out of the splendors of heaven to be the Prince of Peace, the Ruler in Israel.¹⁴ And where would He first make His appearance? Centuries before the Messiah’s birth, the prophet Micah gave us one more piece of the puzzle. Micah (and only Micah) **precisely** revealed the place from which the Messiah would come forth: the little town of Bethlehem in the region of Judea.

The scribes and chief priests in King Herod’s day (Matthew 2:4-6) knew of the Messianic nature of

Micah 5:2. The elitist Pharisees, as well as the “commoners,” knew it some 32 years later (in John 7). And yet, though the Messiah stood in their midst, most missed, ignored, or refused to accept the amazing, fulfilled fact that Jesus was born just five miles down the road in Bethlehem of Judea—just as Micah, the proven inspired prophet (cf. Jeremiah 28:9), promised He would 700 years earlier.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Jesus grew up in Galilee and remained in this region during much of His ministry.
- ² The “crowd” whom the Pharisees claimed did “not know the law” (John 7:49).
- ³ Which is “the name either of Bethlehem itself or of a district in which Bethlehem was situated” [Ernest Masterman (1996), “Ephrath; Ephrathah,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Electronic Database: Bibesoft)]. Moses wrote that after Jacob’s wife Rachel died, she was “buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)” —Genesis 35:19; cf. 48:7.
- ⁴ From where did these men receive such knowledge? How did they know that one particular “star in the East” indicated the Messiah’s entrance into the world? No one can know for sure, but it seems they had Divine direction, per-

haps similar to what they later received in Matthew 2:12.

- ⁵ “Moresheh Gath” (1996), *Fausset’s Bible Dictionary* (Electronic Database: Bibesoft).
- ⁶ Genesis 2:17; 3:8-19; 4:5-15; 6:3-8; Luke 11:49-51; 2 Peter 2:5.
- ⁷ Genesis 3:15; 12:1-4; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; 49:10; Isaiah 11:1,10; 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Jeremiah 23:5-6.
- ⁸ Cf. 2 Kings 18; 2 Chronicles 32; Isaiah 36-37.
- ⁹ “[T]he Rabshakeh said... ‘What confidence is this in which you trust? You speak of having plans of power for war; but they are mere words. And in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me? Now Look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt... [G]ive a pledge to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses—if you are able on your part to put riders on them!... Have I now come up without the Lord against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, “Go up against this land, and destroy it!”... Has my master sent me to your master and to you to speak these words, and not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat and drink their own waste with you?... Do not listen to Hezekiah” (2 Kings 18:19-31).
- ¹⁰ As well as Babylonian captivity roughly 100 years later.
- ¹¹ Homer Hailey (1993) *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Religious Supply), p. 208.
- ¹² The Hebrew term *qedem* literally means “ancient time, aforetime” [Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs (1906), *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, studylight.org/lexicons/eng/hebrew/06924.html]. It is used of God in Deuteronomy 33:27 and Habakkuk 1:12 where the term is translated “everlasting” or “eternal.”
- ¹³ This Hebrew word (*olam*) often refers to “for ever, ever, everlasting, evermore” (Brown, et al., <https://www.studylight.org/lexicons/eng/hebrew/05769.html>). Often it is used in reference to the eternality of God, including in Micah 4:7 where the prophet referenced the Lord’s eternal reign.
- ¹⁴ Cf. John 1:1; 20:28; Philippians 2:5-11.

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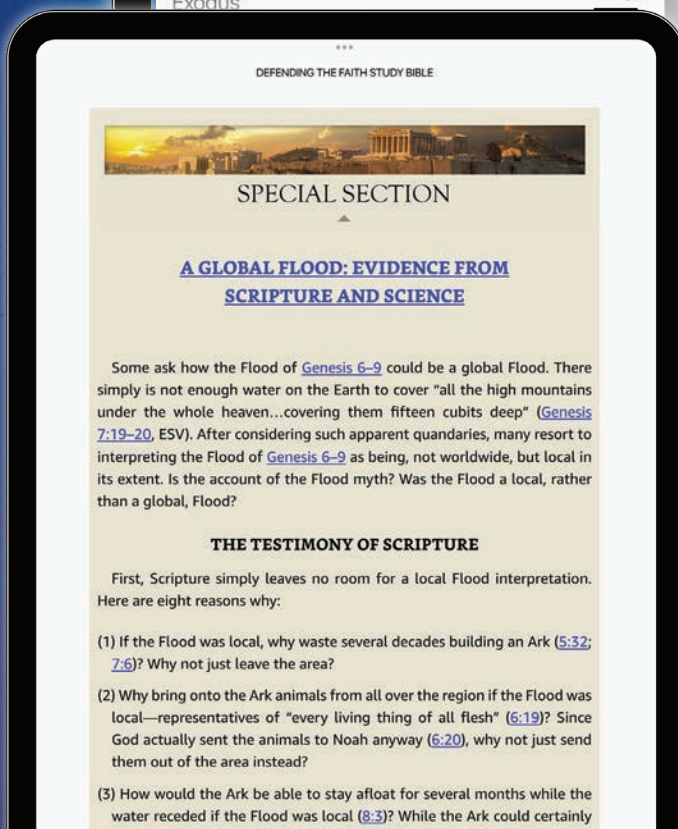
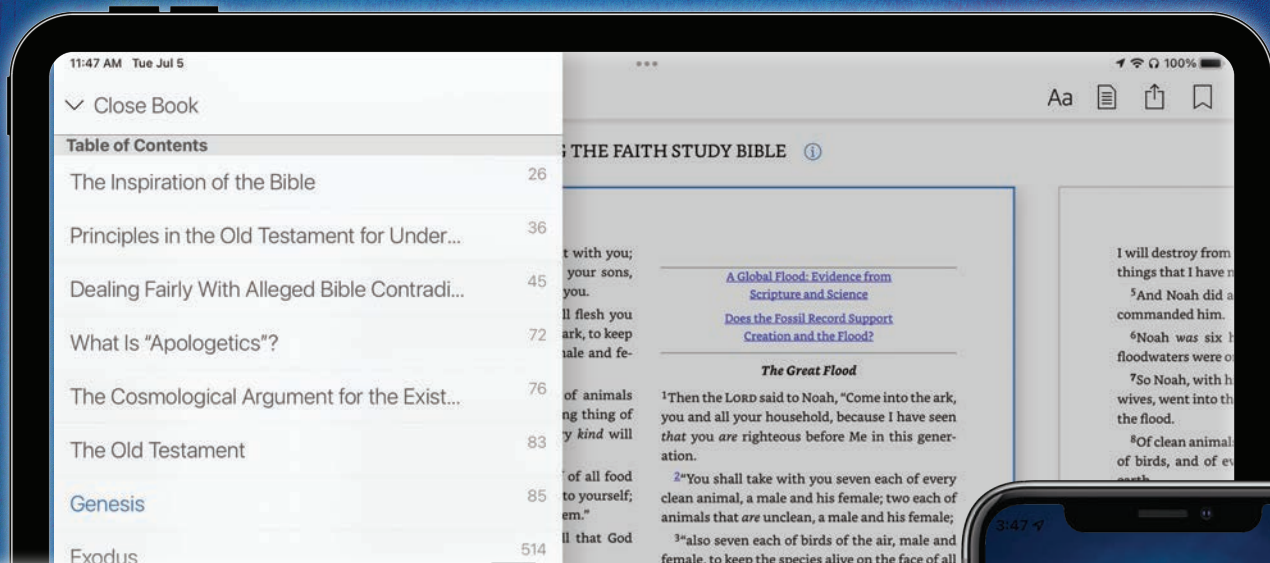
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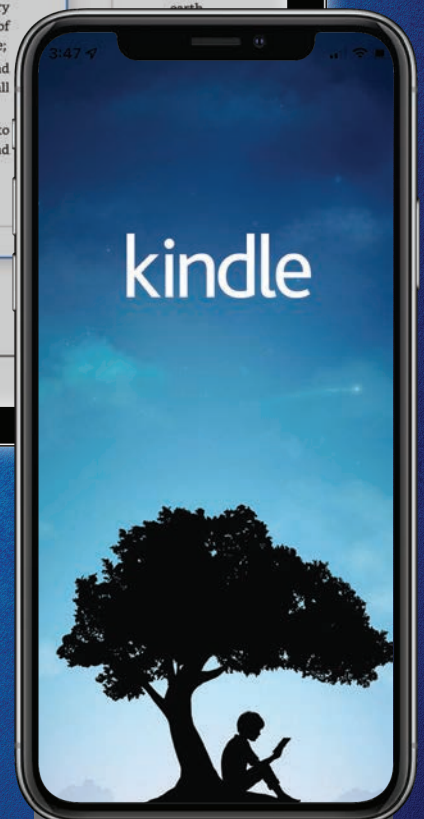
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John the Baptist Prepares the Way

3 ¹ In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" ³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying:

*"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the LORD;
Make His paths straight.'"*

⁴ Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him ⁶ and were baptized

Administered by John	Administered by Jesus' Disciples	Administered Under Christianity
Remission of Sins (Mark 1:4)		Remission of Sins (Acts 2:38)
Prior Repentance Required (Matthew 3:8)		

Preach the Word

4 ¹ I charge you ² therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, ³ who will judge the living and the dead ⁴ at His appearing and His kingdom: ⁵ Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. ⁶ Convince, ⁷ rebuke, ⁸ exhort, with all long-

SPECIAL SECTION

THREE REASONS TO BELIEVE THE BIBLE IS INSPIRED BY GOD

The Bible is the most popular book that has ever been printed. It was one of the first books mass produced on Gutenberg's printing press in 1455. To estimate a total number of Bibles and portions of it that have been produced and distributed worldwide throughout history would be virtually impossible, but the number stands well over 10 billion, since the United Bible Society alone has distributed over nine billion in the past 70 years.¹ Without dispute, the Bible is the best selling book of all time worldwide.²

Why is the Bible so popular? The reason most often given is that those who are printing, distributing, and reading the Bible believe it is the inspired Word of God. Most people who read the Bible do not think it is good advice from mere men. Nor do they think it is a book of fairy tales written for entertainment. Instead, they believe the Book they are reading is the product of the one true God.

Oftentimes, when people are asked to give reasons that support their belief that the Bible is from God, they say that the Bible claims to be from God. It is certainly true that the Bible contains numerous statements that claim inspiration. Second Timothy 3:16-17 states: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God..." In fact, anyone who wants to search the entire Bible will discover that it contains more than 2,700 instances in which divine inspiration is claimed ("God said," "the Lord said," "by revelation He [God] made known").

Yet, even though we would expect to find that any book produced by God would claim divine inspiration, such a claim does not prove anything.

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"I Am He" or "I Am"?

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

THE Bible plainly teaches that Jesus is divine. When He came to Earth to die on the cross for humanity, He was God in the flesh (John 1:14; Colossians 1:15-19). Jesus unhesitatingly called attention to this fact on several occasions since the acknowledgment of this truth is necessary for salvation (Romans 10:9-10). Recall the incident 1,500 years before Jesus came to Earth when Moses was tending livestock in the desert and encountered a bush that was on fire but continued to burn unconsumed. Warning him to keep his distance and remove his shoes, God identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Announcing to Moses his mission to return to Egypt to proclaim to Pharaoh God's demands, Moses proceeded to offer a series of quibbles designed to justify his reluctance to go. One of those excuses was framed in this question: "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (Exodus 3:13, ESV). God's response was decisive: "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (vs. 14).

The import of God's declaration on this occasion pertains to the eternal nature of deity. God is the

Eternal Present, i.e., He has always existed and always will because, unlike everyone else, He possesses infinite eternity. Incredibly, the same may be said of Jesus. He is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). He declares: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End...who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8)—precisely the same thing that is said about God (Revelation 4:8). Since the purpose of the Gospel of John is to cause people to believe that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31), it is to be expected that the book should contain multiple allusions to the deity of Christ—and such is certainly the case. In fact, we encounter several instances in John where Jesus applies to Himself **the same expression that God used at the burning bush: "I AM."**

For example, on the occasion when Jesus faced the incessant unbelief of the Jews, He forthrightly declared to them: "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). The word "He" is in italics in the NKJV and several other translations,¹ indicating the translators' insertion. However, in keeping with the theme of John, as well as the immediate context, its insertion

is unwarranted and obscures the power of Jesus' statement. He was, in fact, forthrightly declaring His deity to the hard-hearted Jews by identifying Himself with the same Deity that Moses encountered at the burning bush.² This fact is evident in the context. Three verses later, Jesus again states: "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things" (vs. 28). Once again, the NKJV places "He" in italics. And then, for a third time, Jesus pointedly presses the fact to bring closure to His confrontation: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" (vss. 55-58). The Jews correctly understood that Jesus was making a direct claim to Deity, evidenced by the fact that they prepared to execute Him for the capital crime of blasphemy.³ Jesus stressed this same point to the Samaritan woman with whom He engaged in a conversation regarding His identity. His remarks were such that she first considers Him to be a prophet (John 4:19). But as He continues to speak, she admits that she is aware of the fact that the Messiah/Christ was yet to come. He uses her admission to declare: "I who speak to you am He" (vs. 26).⁴ Once again, in various translations, the word "He" is in italics to denote its insertion. But I suggest that Jesus was connecting Himself with the "I AM" of the burning bush.

After the feeding of the 5,000, the disciples sought to row back across the Sea of Galilee when there arose a sudden storm. Gripped by fear for their lives, their fear was enhanced by the sudden appearance of Jesus walking on the water toward their boat. "But He said

to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid’” (John 6:20). The English reader would likely never know that the words “It is I” are a translation of the Greek *ego eimi*—“I am.” The only reason for the disciples not to fear a life-threatening situation is if Jesus was more than a mere man who, in fact, possessed the divine power to still a storm. Undoubtedly, Jesus was again calling attention to His divinity—as indicated by the JUB: “I AM. Be not afraid.”⁵ On the occasion when Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, as a predictive prelude to Judas’ betrayal He quoted Psalm 41:9 and declared: “Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He” (John 13:19). Once again, Jesus was deliberately spotlighting His divinity to His disciples by identifying Himself with the burning bush episode. He intended to emphasize to them that they would realize that He is the great “I AM.”

Still another occasion appears to set forth the same realization. When the mob came to arrest Jesus, which consisted of Judas, together with a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, carrying lanterns, torches, and weapons, the text states: “Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, ‘Whom are you seeking?’ They answered Him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am He’” (John 18:4-5). Once again, “He” is in italics. Observe the reaction to Jesus’ identification: “Then—when He said to them, ‘I am He,’—they drew back and fell to the ground” (vs. 6). One might assume that they were surprised that Jesus would come forward and identify himself, since one would think that a criminal would try to evade arrest and not give himself up so easily. But surely such surprise would hardly evoke a reaction that included falling to the ground. Remember, that these

soldiers were not Romans. They were Jewish soldiers sent by the chief priests and Pharisees. Consequently, they were likely quite aware of the Jewish anticipation of the coming Messiah, as well as the import of the expression “I AM.” They were likely initially stunned by the bold, but presumptuous, affirmation by Jesus, only to recover themselves and dismiss the claim to deity as the rantings of a madman.

The following English translation renderings capture the meaning: CEB: “When he said, ‘I Am,’ they shrank back and fell to the ground.” CJB: “When he said, ‘I AM,’ they went backward from him and fell to the ground.” ISV: “When Jesus told them, ‘I AM,’ they backed away and fell to the ground.” JUB: “And when he said unto them, I AM, they went backward and fell to the ground.” Keep in mind that the words “I am” are also used throughout the Bible simply to refer to any person’s existence—even in John where the blind man identified himself as the one that Jesus had healed (9:9). The issue in John, however, is whether Jesus intentionally used the expression to link Himself to God and thereby assert His deity.⁶ It is equally interesting that Jesus enlisted the use of “I am” in seven additional instances when He offered descriptions of His divine nature, each prefaced by *ego eimi*: 1. “I am the Bread of Life” (6:35). 2. “I am the Light of the world” (8:12). 3. “I am the Door” (10:9). 4. “I am the Good Shepherd” (10:4). 5. “I am the Resurrection and the Life” (11:25). 6. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (14:6). 7. “I am the Vine” (15:5). In each of these cases, a feature of Jesus’ Person is spotlighted that can **only describe deity**. No mere human being can rightfully be said to be the Bread of Life, the Light of the world, etc. These glorious affirmations pertain solely to Christ **in His divine state**.

To summarize, it so happens that the expression “I am He” likewise connotes that Jesus is the divine Messiah Who was to come. So, the import remains the same either way. However, inserting the word “He” was not only unnecessary, its insertion obscures and softens the force of Jesus’ claim explicitly linking Himself directly to the statement spoken by God to Moses at the burning bush. Indeed, the very heart and core of Christianity is Christ as the divine Son of God. One cannot even be a Christian unless that divinity is orally confessed prior to conversion (Romans 10:9-10).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ ASV, BRG, KJV, LEB, NASB (1995).
- ² Several English translations recognize this fact and refrain from inserting “He,” including: CEB, ERV, GNT, ISV, PHILIPS, JUB, NABRE, NASB, TPT, TLV, WYC.
- ³ “Believing that He was speaking sheer blasphemy and claiming equality with the great ‘I Am,’ they sought to stone Him”—Marcus Dods (no date), *The Gospel According to John in The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 1:782.
- ⁴ Literally: “I am, the one speaking to you.”
- ⁵ Also the CEB, TLV, and WYC.
- ⁶ For more discussion of the nuances of the Greek, including the issue of the predicate nominative, see Robertson, *Grammar*, pp. 879-880; Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 5:68, 146, 242, 284; Alford, 1:801-802; P.B. Harner (1970), *The “I AM” of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress); Raymond Brown (1977), “The EGO EIMI (‘I Am’) Passages In the Fourth Gospel” in *A Companion to John: Readings in Johannine Theology*, ed. Michael Taylor (New York: Alba House), pp. 117-126; Georg Braumann and Hans-Georg Line (1976), “I Am,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 2:278-283; E.D. Freed (1982), “Ego Eimi in John viii. 24 in the Light of Its Context and Jewish Messianic Belief,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 33, 1:163-167, April.

Gentiles Received the Spirit **Before** Baptism?

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

THE conversion of the first Gentiles was an incredible moment in redemptive history—literally fulfilling prophecies spoken centuries earlier (e.g., Isaiah 62:2). Here is Luke’s description of the momentous event:

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because **the gift of the Holy Spirit** had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard **them speak with tongues** and magnify God. Then Peter answered, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be **baptized** in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days (Acts 10:44-48).

It is evident from this account that the Gentiles received the Spirit **before** they were baptized in water. Jesus stated emphatically: “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, **whom the world cannot receive**” (John 14:16-17). If that be the case, how can water baptism be “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38) in order to be “clothed with

Christ” (Galatians 3:27)? Does the Bible contradict itself? How can anyone receive the Spirit **before** he/she is clothed with Christ?

The answer to these questions lies in a deeper examination of the underlying language. In the first place, John 14:17 uses the Greek verb *lambano*, which is the usual word for “to take with the hand, lay hold of, any person or thing in order to use it,” “to take in order to carry away,” “to seize, take away forcibly.”¹ In this verse, Jesus was not saying that unsaved persons cannot receive the Holy Spirit. Consider the context:

If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you (John 14:15-18).

*How can anyone receive the Spirit **before** they are clothed with Christ?*

Jesus was assuring the disciples that, though He soon would be seized and taken away from them, nevertheless, He would send in His place the Holy Spirit—**Whom His enemies could not take away**. In fact, He would abide with them forever. Therefore, verse 17 says nothing about whether an unsaved individual can be the recipient of Holy Spirit activity.

The conversion of the Gentiles in Acts 10 is recounted by Peter in Acts 11 when he came to Jerusalem. Luke reports that “Peter explained it to them **in order**² from the beginning” (vs. 4), suggesting that the account in Acts 10 is not necessarily in strict order. Peter explains how “he entered the man’s house” where Cornelius informed him that an angel had appeared and instructed him to “send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, **who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved**” (vss. 13-14). Observe carefully that Cornelius could not be saved **until and without** hearing inspired words that would instruct him how to be saved.

Having been informed about this fact by Cornelius, Peter next states: “And as I **began** to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning” (vs. 15). The Greek term rendered “began” (*arxasthai*) means “to begin,” “to denote what one begins to do.”³ “Peter had scarcely begun to speak.”⁴ Indeed, Peter was **just beginning** to speak, not having yet expressed the words of salvation. He had not yet been given the opportunity to convey the words by which Cornelius and his household could be saved. He was, in fact, **interrupted** in his efforts by their reception of the Spirit. Greek lexicographer Thayer makes this very point when he states that the word “indicates that a thing was but **just begun** when it was **interrupted** by something else.”⁵

Those who assume that reception of the Spirit on this occasion was proof of the Gentiles' **saved** condition completely miss the very reason God administered Holy Spirit baptism to them. The Gentiles' reception of the baptism of the Holy Spirit had **nothing to do with their salvation**. It merely served to prove to the Jews that **the Gentiles had an equal right to enter the kingdom**. Indeed, only two instances of Holy Spirit baptism are explicitly reported in the New Testament, and neither had anything to do with the salvation of the recipients.⁶ In the first instance, depicted in Acts 2, the purpose was to equip the apostles (who were **already** saved) to launch the Christian religion. The second instance (Acts 10) served the purpose of demonstrating to the Jewish Christians that non-Jews had a divine right to have access to the Gospel and enter the kingdom⁷—which explains precisely why, after such a powerful divine demonstration, Peter immediately called for water baptism, since that act is the divinely-designed entranceway into the Kingdom (Acts 10:47-48; John 3:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13).⁸

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Thayer, p. 370, italics in orig.
- ² The Greek word means "in sequence in time, space, or logic, in order, one after the other" [Danker, et al., p. 490, italics in orig.], "successively" [W.J. Hickie (1977 reprint), *Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 92], "in succession" [Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 3:152].
- ³ Perschbacher, p. 55; Danker, et al., p. 140.
- ⁴ R.C.H. Lenski (1961 reprint), *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), p. 444.
- ⁵ Thayer, p. 78.
- ⁶ For an extensive examination of the phenomenon of "Holy Spirit Baptism" in the New Testament, see Dave Miller (2020), *Modern-Day Miracles? Do Miracles, Tongue Speaking, & Holy Spirit Baptism Occur Today?* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press), pp. 39ff.
- ⁷ "also for the Greek"—Romans 1:16; 2:9,10.
- ⁸ For additional discussion, see Kyle Butt (2012), "If Cornelius Had the Holy Spirit, Doesn't That Mean He Was Saved?" <https://apologeticspress.org/if-cornelius-had-the-holy-spirit-doesnt-that-mean-he-was-saved-1693/>.

Spider or Lizard?



Dave Miller, Ph.D.

Q: Proverbs 30:24-28 mentions four tiny, exceedingly wise animals. The King James Bible called the last one "spider," but the Amplified version called it "lizard." These two species are unrelated and totally different. Which of the Bible translations renders the last animal right as compared to the Hebrew word?

A: Sometimes the meaning of a Bible word can be difficult to pinpoint, especially when it is used only one time and particularly if it refers to a specie of animal. The Hebrew lacked specificity on such technical distinctions. The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) used the word *kalaboteis*¹ which classical scholars Liddell and Scott identify as equivalent to *askalaboteis* defined as the "spotted lizard, gecko."² The current most popular Hebrew lexicon also identifies the creature as a type of lizard, specifically, the gecko.³ The Septuagint used

the same Greek word in Leviticus 11:30 for a different Hebrew word (*anacah*) which is also identified as a gecko.⁴ Most English translations have "lizard" rather than "spider," including the ASV, ESV, NASB, NIV, RSV, and NRSV. The important thing to focus on is the meaning intended by the context—which is stated in verse 24: "There are four things which are little on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise." That's the point the inspired writer is making.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Edwin Hatch and Henry Redpath (1897), *A Concordance to the Septuagint* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press), 2:712.
- ² Henry Liddell and Robert Scott (1940), *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press), pp. 256,865.
- ³ L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, M.E.J. Richardson, & J.J. Stamm (1994-2000), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, electronic ed.), p. 1338.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

SPEAKING SCHEDULES

Kyle Butt

August 7	Athens, AL	(256) 232-1096
August 10	Florence, AL	(256) 764-9642
August 17	Trussville, AL	(205) 833-1400
August 19-21	Sevierville, TN	(877) 338-3397
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Eric Lyons

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August 5-6	Mountain Home, AR	(870) 425-4330
August 17	Hope Hull, AL	(334) 281-6020
August 22-24	Sevierville, TN	(256) 290-0702
August 26-28	San Saba, TX	(325) 372-5584

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August 7	Montgomery, AL	(334) 264-2985
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July 31 - Aug. 3	Prattville, AL	(334) 365-4201
August 18-20	Sevierville, TN	(256) 290-0702



NOTE FROM

The Editor

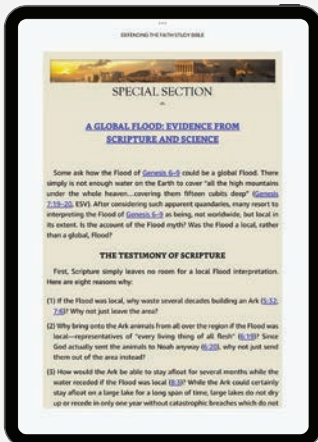


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